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[The Atlanta Journal-Constitution: 1/22/04]

Fire hits chemical warehouse in ForsythBy BILL MONTGOMERY

Atlanta Journal-Constitution Staff Writer

Drifting smoke from a warehouse fire at a Forsyth County chemical firm Thursday morning caused authorities to close Ga. 400 and evacuate homes and businesses within a half-mile of the blaze.



Flames and smoke pour from the Regal Chemical Plant near the Forsyth-Fulton County line Thursday morning. WSB-TV

The fire, at Branch Drive at McFarland Road, was reported at 7:35 a.m. in a 10,000-square-foot

building at the Regal Chemical Plant, which makes fertilizer and pesticides, said assistant county administrator Dane Perry.

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Cause of the fire is not known, but Perry said there were no reports of injuries. "We believe there was some kind of explosion, and there were people on the scene, but they evacuated safely," Perry said.

Firefighters "are letting the fire burn itself out, because we're not sure of the potential danger of putting water on it," Perry said. "We don't have a full inventory of the chemicals in the building, so we don't want to take chances on how some might react to water," he added.

Heavy smoke blowing in the direction of Ga. 400 caused authorities to shut the highway north and southbound from McFarland Road to Peachtree Parkway around 8:15 a.m.

Homes within a half mile radius of the warehouse were evacuated "as a precaution due to the content of the smoke, but fortunately the area between McFarland Road and Ga. 400 is largely industrial," he added.

Five schools within a mile and a half to five miles of the fire have shut down their heating and ventilation systems, and students are being kept inside, "in the interests of safety," Perry said.

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Enrollment numbers roughly 5,000 to 6,000 students at the five schools, including Big Creek Elementary, Vickery Elementary and Middle schools, Midway Elementary and South Forsyth High School, Perry said.

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